1: Ammar E, 1-5 (1951) 1954
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one a piece of land, and to the less favoured a large piece of gold. As the first son complained about his inheritance, his dying father told him that every grain of earth he had left for him was mixed with a grain of gold, and that if he dug well enough he would be able to extract the gold from it. After a lapse of some time the less favoured one squandered his gold, while the other, by 'digging' harder and harder, added to the fertility of his land and thus prospered and was worthy of his father's love. For this reason, the latter was taken as an ideal symbol of filial piety.

As mentioned previously, to have origin in the village is also to have land, and this is reflected in the scheme of the village land. The cultivable land was divided between the descendants of 'On and Musa, the two brothers, who were the heads of the village sections.[1] It is maintained that every ten kasabas (land-measure) of land owned by 'On clansmen is followed by another ten kasabas owned by Musa clansmen. 'If you have no sahm or kirat (land-measure) handed over to you from your ancestors, then you are not a full member of your clan,' Ali stated, 'and two families had to migrate from the village to another village because they had to sell their land. It is the worst lot that can befall any person. It brings disgrace to him to abandon his father's trust, and it also means that he is sinning against his children. There are few people still in the village who have sold their land, and they are like those who have shed their clothes and remained stark naked; both are the two great shame-bringing practices.'

Yet those who are under considerable economic pressure resort to the device of 'land-pawn' which entails the owner's handing over of his land to a man in return for a comparatively large sum of money. The latter tills the land as if it was his possesion, to be returned to its original owner on his payment of the debt. Another way of relieving economic distress without actually selling the land is the so-called 'conditional sale', whereupon the owner sells with option to repurchase at a given date.

If selling land is one of the worst social practices, the acquisition of land is naturally the best one. To be able to add to one's inheritance is a sign of parents' approval and content with their son's deeds as well as God's blessing. It is interesting to find children about the age of five or six singing a rhyme, telling how a chicken given to a child by his mother has enabled him in the long run to acquire a 'kirat'—one twenty-fourth of a feddan. The rhyme goes on to say, 'My mother gave me a chicken, the chicken bought me a goose, the goose bought me a small goat, the goat bought me a sheep, the sheep bought me a small donkey, the donkey bought me a cow and the cow bought me a kirat'. There is another version of the same song, differing in what the cow bought for the child, and in the other version he got a 'bride' and the bride got him a 'bridegroom—a son'.[2]

From the point of view of land tenure, the village is a typical example of

[1] See Chapter II for social structure.
[2] The rhyme is occasionally associated with bouncing the ball on the wall.

1: Ammar E, 1-5 (1951) 1954
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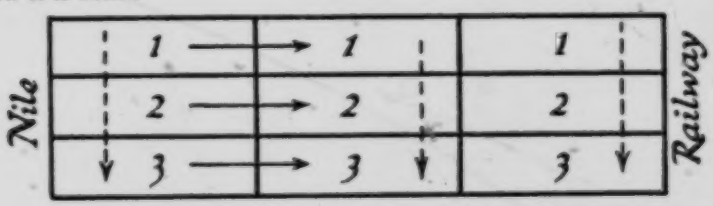
428 according to their share as if they were renting it to their brothers. In cases of friction, the land is parcelled between the heirs, and boundaries are [651] fixed; yet in the tax bill (wird) they are not divided and each has to pay his share of the tax, all being considered 'heirs of so and so'. This was originally a public demonstration of family unity. Lately, the separation of one's own land through official registration has been made an expensive task because of the fees required.

My informant, Mahmoud, told me that 'in these days, more often than [578] not, heirs insist on dividing the land, and this occasions the hottest disputes between brothers, sisters and relatives. Law-suits over land have sometimes cost people the land itself, when they had to mortgage more and more parts of their land to establish their rights over another part. No one "yields a finger" in his share of his father's land; and above all, obstinacy and "the assertion of one's word" complicate the matter. Our life is mostly spent in setting my right and your right—hakki hakkak.'

The actual process of dividing the land is done lengthwise, from 'the sea to the mountain' as the villagers put it. The following diagram shows how it is done:



Suppose the above plot of land is to be divided equally between three brothers; each would receive a narrow plot extending lengthwise, in the direction of the lined arrow, and not breadthwise in the direction of the dotted arrow. The land stretches normally from the Nile to the railway [311] station for more than a mile. It would be understandable that the villagers' division is better when the land varies in its fertility or ease of irrigation along that stretch. But this is always the practice, which involves more work in carrying fertilizer, and in irrigation. It also elongates the boundaries, thus providing more scope for breaking them and inviting trouble. The underlying notion behind this division, according to Mahmoud, is to share in every 'foot and finger' of the land that the father has bequeathed, irrespective of any other considerations, and hence there would be no difficulty in distributing the plots of land among the heirs. Such clinging [435] to every bit of the father's land renders the mutual transference of land, for the sake of convenience, very difficult to achieve.

241 The main crops grown are wheat and barley in winter, and millet in summer. This applies practically to every farmer in the village, as these crops provide the basis of his subsistence. Before the perennial irrigation, one main crop in winter was the general produce, but now these two

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should be declined by saying, 'God compensates me in a better way'.

The following three instances are concrete situations showing the working of the social structure. The first is the installation of a new corn mill by all the clans in the village to bring to an end the monopoly of the already existing privately owned mill. The rough estimates were divided into 24 kirats (parts), each section responsible for collecting the money equivalent to its 12 kirats.[1] In the second process of distribution, each section divides its share amongst the clans, and the head of each clan is responsible for collecting his share from family heads; by dividing his kirats into sahms, the people of his clan could buy a minimum of one-tenth of a sahm. No section or clan could be helped or its shares be taken by another. It was interesting to listen to the village crier calling out the names of the clans and the two sections, to induce haste in collecting the money.

Such procedure was followed for repairing the village mosque. In this case the question was not so much that of collecting money, as of recruiting the men to bring stone, water, straw, etc., for the repairs; and this was also dealt with on the same structural basis.

The third instance was the allocation of new building land to the village, which was also first divided into two sections; then each section was divided into equal parts amongst its clans, which in turn had to divide its share among the families.

The system of village government reflects a combination of central authority agents and the village social organization. The village head is an official called 'Omda' who used to be elected from a list of five people who own not less than 10 feddans. Two years ago, the law was changed and the Omda is now elected from amongst thirteen people who own enough land to make them eligible. The job is unpaid, and it is reckoned as a privilege to be elected. The Omda's seniority is something like the medieval *primus inter pares*. He represents the village on official occasions. One of his traditional and honorary functions is to receive guests, travellers, and government officials in his guest house. Silwa has also two unpaid 'Sheikhs' each representing one of the two sections of the village and thus commonly referred to as 'Sheikh hissa'; these are also elected from amongst those who are eligible (minimum requirement was 5 feddans, now being relaxed). The Omda and the two sheikhs settle the disputes that arise in the village, usually with the aid of Arab councils, or with the help of people whom they select on different occasions. Each sheikh is primarily concerned with the problems of his section (hissa).

The central government is represented by the police headquarters with a police officer or constable in charge and policemen and ghafeers. While the policemen are always from outside the village, the ghafeers are villagers, put up usually from different clans, acting as the Omda's messengers, as well as the local agents between the village and the police headquarters.

[1] The feddan has 24 kirats, and each kirat 12 sahms.

There are today more than fifteen thousand *ezbas*. Their 361
importance and the number of their inhabitants are proportionate to the area of the estate. Some have grown into full-sized villages, but most of them depend, administratively, on the village from which they sprang.

Not only the houses on an *ezba*, but all the imp- 361
lements and machinery, too, whether ancient, like the 422
saqia and the *norag*, or modern, like the pumping-engine and 427
the threshing-machine, together with the store-houses and, more often than not, the animals, belong to the owner of the estate. If he cultivates it directly, the fellaheen are day-labourers; if not, they are usually tenants or share-croppers. In either case they are in a sense bound to the soil, and remain so in spite of changes of ownership, unless evicted for some other reason.

It may be that the owner has mortgaged his land. 427
About a million feddans are thus burdened. If he cannot 423
pay the interest, the bank forecloses. In 1935 fifty thousand 425
feddans were thus expropriated because of debt.

It often happens that the holdings of the fellaheen are seized at the same moment. But who is there to discriminate? They may already have paid the Bey or the Pasha their dues, and are in no way responsible for his debts; but that is no concern of the creditors, who needs must foreclose on the mortgage.

One of the large banks had seized an *ezba* belonging to 427
a notable of the region of Shoubra Ris, in the Markaz of 625
Kafr-el-Zayyât. A number of lots on this *ezba* had been let 579
out to villagers, many of whom had been living on them for 423
upwards of twenty years. When the bank's bailiff arrived to carry out the seizure, the villagers resisted him, and the police had to interfere. The assistant chief constable of the *markaz* arrived on the scene at the head of an armed force, but was attacked by the people. Seeing that the situation promised to grow more serious, he felt himself obliged to order shots to be fired in the air to frighten the fellaheen. The effect was to exasperate them. They proceeded to cut the telephone wires and burn the bailiff's car. A new body of police soon came to the rescue, but proved as useless as the first. Finally the Mudeer appeared on the scene at the head of yet a third force and order was re-established only when fur-

423 425 426 Small properties do not result solely from the subdivision of inheritances, but also from the acquisition of tiny plots as money becomes available. The fellah is so hungry for land that he buys it, more often than not, at a ruinous price; this is also partly because he buys only a few *kirats* at a time. In order to pay for it he supplements his savings by contracting a debt.

423 425 426 556 The demand is so high that the lots are sold for the best price offered, and, in forced sales, by auction. Here is an example of what may happen. Ten feddans are on sale for L.E. 400. A dozen fellaheen join together to buy them at that price, and divide them up among themselves. But a rich landowner of the neighbourhood gets wind of the business. He arrives a few hours before the sale and sits down at a café in full view of everybody. He boasts openly that he is ready to buy the lot at no matter what price. The fellaheen, threatened with disappointment, come up and beg him to withdraw, offering money as compensation. He lets them plead, bargains with them, then pockets his gains and leaves the village, in high glee at the success of his stratagem, which he will repeat when opportunity offers. The fellaheen, who have given him L.E. 10 for nothing, think the bargain good.

The Government

656 [312] The Government, by its control of the land, and still more of the water, is supreme over capital and labour, and over the peasant class. As master of the irrigation system, it assumes for the fellah all the power and importance of the Nile. The more the State regulates the river, the greater the dependence on it of both soil and men of the soil.

As Egypt is an agricultural country, almost every Government organisation is, in the long run, giving orders to the fellah. In industry and in the large towns, the Government willingly entrusts the public services to private enterprise. In agricultural matters, on the contrary, it assumes many functions which in other countries are undertaken by private persons. So much so that for the rural population the Government is a kind of overriding providence, while the fellah is regarded by the Government as a helpless child, who has constantly to be ordered about and protected from his own ignorance.